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ABSTRACT

Student teachers need specific guidelines for classroom discipline that include preventive techniques, direct techniques, and techniques for dealing with severe or consistent misbehavior. This guide gives examples for each technique along with the proper situation for their use. (CJ)

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Mission Possible: The Pre-service Teacher and Discipline

Can college students working in field experiences maintain class control? Many pre-service teachers, supervising teachers, and college supervisors maintain that discipline is the main area of weakness for these students. And the problem of classroom management continues as pre-service teachers move into the roles of in-service teachers. Findings identified in "The Eleventh Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools" (1979) indicate that the most important problem facing public schools is discipline.

Why are students who are capable of writing beautiful behavioral objectives incapable of maintaining discipline? Perhaps the variation in the specificity of procedures given for these two aspects of teaching relates to the difference in student capabilities. According to Hyman (1979), there is no definitive theory of moral development from which uniform discipline procedures may be developed. Additionally, effectiveness of discipline methods is somewhat dependent on the personality of the teacher. Research by Hyman indicates that specific methods of discipline are contingent upon the leadership styles of the teachers. Therefore, we sometimes tell students, "You must try various discipline approaches and see

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what works for you." With this "trial and error" method, the pre-service teacher usually has a greater share of "error" resulting in confusion and a lower self-concept of his or her teaching ability.

Pre-service teachers are not secure enough in their teaching to utilize "trial and error" approaches. Houck, Sherman, and Biskin (1977) contend and have conducted research which supports the concept that teacher preparation programs have the responsibility for developing skills which reinforce the use of systematic management of classroom behavior. Pre-service teachers need identified, specific guidelines for discipline, just as they do for other aspects of teaching.

Guidelines should consist of concise lists or procedural steps rather than long discourses in behavior management. Examples of guidelines which may be helpful to pre-service teachers are provided below. These disciplinary guidelines include preventive techniques, direct techniques, and techniques for dealing with consistent or severe misbehavior.

Preventive Techniques

According to McDaniel (1979), use of preventive techniques is of utmost importance. He relates this method of maintaining discipline to the old adage, "A stitch in time saves nine."

1. Plan interesting, exciting, lessons that meet the instructional needs of the individuals you are teaching. What

does this have to do with discipline? Everything! Boredom, frustration, and mental fatigue breed behavior problems.

2. Introduce lessons in such a way that they will entice the children to cooperate.

3. Identify expectations early. What do the children need on their desks? May they talk during this activity? May students move from one area to another? Let them know early what is expected of them.

4. Involve the group. Students who are not involved with the lesson may easily become involved with other activities. Some lessons may utilize more student involvement than others. However, even in an activity such as reading a story to them, the use of eye contact, movement, and questioning will involve the students.

5. Reinforce! Use a variety of methods of reinforcement and use them often. Reinforce not only correct answers, but also good behavior. If the total group is working well, tell them! If only a few are, express reinforcement of these to the group. This will probably produce a positive ripple effect, with others imitating the reinforced behavior.

6. Move! A stationary teacher is like a stationary soldier in combat, an easy target. A mobile teacher can move to areas as problems develop, often before they become real problems. Simply moving in the area will serve as a preventive measure.

Direct Techniques

All of the techniques listed above are preventive methods of maintaining control. However, teachers often need to utilize more direct methods to handle specific problems. What can be done? There are a variety of techniques, some which are often used too soon. A plan of action is needed for handling problems before movement to methods such as isolation. Karlin and Berger (1972) maintain that children need and want a structured plan for classroom management. The pre-service teacher's plan of action should be discussed with and approved by the supervising teacher. The following techniques are possibilities for progressive actions to take when problems occur.

1. Use non-verbal techniques to let the child or children know of your awareness of a discipline problem. These techniques may include flicking of lights, pausing in explanation or discussion, eye contact, movement to the problem and touching.

2. Ask the child if he needs help. If a child is not following directions and understands them, he will tend to conform to them when asked if help is needed. If he does not understand the directions, he may really need help before effective participation is possible.

3. Verbally emphasize limits in a positive manner. For example tell the child or children, "You need to listen to this explanation," or "You need to keep your hands to yourself."

4. Go to the child and physically help him to follow the limits. Guiding the child to the area he is supposed to be in is an exmaple of this technique.

5. Discuss with the child alternative actions that may be taken. The child should understand the possibility of privilege denial or isolation that may result if his behavior does not change. This serves as a "warning" and usually prevents further action.

6. Deny privileges. The denial may include free play or some other activity the child enjoys. When denial occurs it is imperative that the child understands reasons for the action.

7. Isolate the child from others in the classroom. There is a wide variety of isolation techniques ranging from simply moving the child to another table in the classroom to utilizing a special "time-out" area. When this technique is utilized, a discussion should take place between teacher and student concerning reasons for the isolation and the student's plan of action for improving behavior.

Techniques for Dealing With Consistent or Severe Misbehavior

In some instances, children may demonstrate consistent or severe behavior problems. In these cases the pre-service teacher's supervising teacher may utilize outside help (parents, principal, counselor, or behavior disorder specialists) to determine a method of behavior management.

"Too often teachers are afraid to admit failure with a child; in reality, however, the admission of the need for help is an indication of a professional teacher. Recognition of serious behavior difficulties and prompt referral can insure early treatment for the child" (Leeper, 1963).

Summary

The techniques identified are possibilities that may be beneficial to pre-service teachers. These or similar guidelines should be provided for education students to use as a beginning point for developing methods of classroom control. It is imperative that we as teacher educators, initiate this guidance. The future of education depends on future educators, and future educators are depending on us.

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